

EXODUS 14,15
'NEVER-GIVING-UP' FAITH

What are your expectations of life? What were your expectations of Christian faith when you first embraced faith for yourself? How have these expectations changed over life? I wonder if you remember the day when you stood here (or in another congregation) and professed faith for the first time; the day when someone like me asked you the question "Do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?" How did that feel? I hope that it felt a good thing to do, that there was a certain amount of excitement about it, that there was something special going on in your life to get to that point? Was there the expectation of something good that you're embarking on? Would you say same now? Have these expectations been blunted by your experience of life, that there have been some disappointments along the way? I'd be surprised if it is not like that for most of us.

We've been telling the story of Moses and the Exodus and we left it two weeks ago at the Passover; Israel was on their way! They were leaving Egypt and were leaving behind the life of slavery, oppression and fear; they were leaving behind the place where they had been down-trodden, and where their sons had been killed. They were on their way to freedom and were going with Egyptian gold in their bags, given to them by people who were glad to see back of them! God had saved them, had rescued them and they were on their way to the Promised Land; God going with them and was guiding them. They were full of excitement; the journey is under way and they are going home. But this is no walk in the park; there is nothing easy or straightforward about this journey, as they are about to find out. They are not going the short way, but God is leading them the roundabout way, the way through the desert; the short way is the harder way, enemies lie that way and Israel will give up, so God leads them into desert!

Chapter 14 brings us to one of the most famous episodes in this journey, the crossing of the Red Sea. There is a coming together of a number of things before that happens: first of all, God tells them to walk round in circles; Pharaoh thinks they're lost and that he can bring them back; he has lost his cheap work-force, so he leads his army out. Israel is trapped: the impassable sea in front of them, the powerful Egyptian enemy army behind them and they're stuck and so they complain: "*Was it...*" (*Exodus 14:11*) All of this is going on and there are yet two more elements that we need to feed into mix: first of all, Moses' faith: "*Do not...*" (*Exodus 14:13f*) Moses had learned to trust God; he knew that all was not lost, but that God knew what He was doing and so he trusted. "*By faith...*" (*Hebrews 11:29a*) Secondly, God's presence and power: "*tell the...*" (*Exodus 14:15f*) So became the opening for one of the great Bible miracle events, the parting of the Red Sea and the people walking through the sea on dry land to escape their enemies for ever. God leads His people through the sea and into freedom; the journey that began on Passover has just been confirmed. The power of God is seen again in the most remarkable way. Chapter 15 is a song to celebrate God's rescue and their freedom: "*I will...*" (*Exodus 15:1f*)

What did these people expect when they began their journey? We get some idea of that from the complaint they make when the wheels appear to fall off. They left with hope and excitement in their hearts, but then things start to get difficult. 'Where are we going? Why are we not going home the quick way? Why are we still in danger? How will we get out of this mess? We hadn't expected to be in this mess in the first place!' There is a sense of disappointment that God has let them down; maybe God has even gone away. This

sense of disappointment clouds their judgment – “let’s go back!” They had forgotten how awful life was in Egypt and they blamed Moses for bringing them into these tough situations! They are afraid and their fear paralyses them. This is such a good picture of how life is for new Christians: we begin with such hope and excitement in our hearts and then wonder what we’ve done wrong when it seems as if the wheels fall off. We find ourselves in tough situations, life situations, or in faith dilemmas and we wonder if God has abandoned us or what mistakes we’ve made to make such a mess of things. But Israel was in this situation because God was leading them and God would lead them through it and out of it. Their faith will grow through this testing!

“Do not...”; “Stand...”; “move on.” (Exodus 14:13f) This is all about faith! It is all about faith that never gives up. Israel had forgotten God and so they complained and were afraid. For a moment they were to stop and ponder their situation; Moses invited them to remember that God was there with them; they had seen God’s power at work and they would see that power at work again. They were to move on and by moving on they were to put Moses’ faith into practice. God would rescue them from everything that made them afraid. God is there with them; God is able to help them; God will be with them always and everywhere – Moses’ faith, at least, sees all of that and trusts. This faith is tested: the waters of Red Sea are moved back and when Moses put his foot into the mud, this is a huge act of faith; he trusted God to keep His promise; he trusted that God was able to keep the waters open. They moved on by faith and Moses’ faith was rewarded.

A faith that never gives up? There are all sorts of reasons why faith comes under pressure: the sheer events and experiences of life are hard for us to cope with and there are times when we’re afraid or it seems as if God has gone away. The challenges and dilemmas of faith – which way to choose? Church and relationships with fellow Christians are not always as good as they should be and these make us question our faith and involvement with the Church. “Fear disrupts faith and becomes the biggest obstacle to trusting and obeying God.” (John Ortberg) *“Do not...”; “Stand...”; “move on.” (Exodus 14:13f)* This is all about faith that never gives up, faith sees that God is still there, that sees that God is able to save us completely, that sees that God’s power is still able to help us; the challenge for us is to live by that faith every day.

The Communion service invites us to see this in another kind of way. Communion shows us the love and the presence and power of God in bread and wine. God is with us and that is seen in the most profound way in Jesus and His cross. Here is God who knows the tough things of life and shares these tough things with us and is with us in our tough things. The power of God is able to overcome these tough things – Jesus is a risen Saviour and Lord and His power is still at work in us to save us and strengthen us. Communion is to remind us of God so that our faith will be stronger, so that we have a faith that never gives up. May that faith have new energy, new zeal today. May God give us a faith that never gives us.